

Ambassador Laskaris's Remarks at the Embassy's Celebration of U.S. Independence Day

Good evening ladies and gentlemen ... my fellow Americans ... friends of the United States and of our Embassy ... welcome and thank you for honoring us with your presence this evening.

As we celebrate the independence of the United States, we also extend Ramadan wishes to Muslims throughout the world. We join with all people of faith in prayers for our peace, health and prosperity.

In addition to celebrating the 239th anniversary of American independence, we are also celebrating another important anniversary in our march towards equal rights and equal opportunity for all ... 25 years ago our Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. Our disabled citizens and their families have benefitted from this law, and our society has benefited from their previously under-used skills and talents.

We understand that life for most Guineans is a daily challenge to put food on the table and take care of the family, but particularly during our religious holidays, our thoughts and our actions must always be with and for those who struggle the most. In Guinea's case, surely it is her handicapped sons and daughters.

It has been at times a difficult year for us in the United States; we have had to confront some very troubling, violent realities in Ferguson, Missouri; Staten Island; Baltimore; and Charleston. At the same time, we are also celebrating major progress towards a more perfect union, confirmed by the Supreme Court in recent decisions on access to health care for all our citizens and on the right of all Americans to have their marriages recognized by the state.

An end to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a growing demand throughout the world and priority for us at home and abroad.

After almost three years in Guinea, I have come to the conclusion that the United States has one key role in your country. We are your optimists, the people who remind you of your strengths.

One of the joys of serving as representatives of the American people in Guinea is that we see the best your country has to offer:

- We see your best traditions of welcoming guests into your communities;
- We see the richest aspects of your culture;
- We see the most beautiful parts of your land;
- We eat the best food when we visit your homes;
- We see what President Abraham Lincoln would have called "the better angels of your nature."

Because we are privileged to see you at your best, optimism comes easily to us.

Over the last several weeks I have been privileged to participate as an observer in the national political dialog. Together with our French, European Union, ECOWAS, *Francophonie* and United Nations colleagues, we are engaged in the process that will – I believe – lead to the kind of elections that the people of Guinea demand, and that they deserve. I am proud to support the mediator of the dialog, Maitre Cheik Sako, Minister of State for Justice.

I am also proud to support our friend Dr. Sekoba Keita, who is leading Guinea's 15-month effort to fight Ebola. Guineans and their international partners have come together to fight this epidemic, and to help rebuild the state's capacity to deliver health care to its citizens ... for Ebola, but also for the many other diseases that threaten Guinea's people.

In both the national political dialog and the fight against Ebola, we have skilled and dedicated Guineans taking the lead, and we have foreign partners providing financial and technical assistance. I am optimistic that the parties will reach consensus on the way forward for peaceful and credible democratic elections, and I continue to believe that we will get to zero on Ebola.

Many of the people here tonight have been our allies in the fight against Ebola: doctors, nurses, sages, imams, priests, volunteers and survivors ... we need to stay together and we need to reach every village and every family in Guinea. We need to go where the virus has appeared but we also need to go to areas that have not experienced Ebola.

We have also learned through painful experience that we cannot educate five brothers in a family but ignore the sixth. We cannot go to Maferenye but not Kabak; we cannot go to Forecariah but not Benty; we cannot win in *Guinee Forestiere* but not *Basse Cote*, and we cannot succeed in Liberia if we do not succeed in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

I speak to you this evening as a veteran of three years of political negotiations and 15 months of fighting Ebola. In both capacities, I have worked with the senior leadership of the country and its political class, and I have gone deep into the countryside to speak with *wo kha xesakae*, *wo kha dalisekanta*, *wo kha yexe surie*, *wo kha sarematie*, *a nun wo kha walikae*.

N xanuteni LaGineekae ...

Sekou Toureya, Koundara, Siguiri a nun Lola tagi, wo falane n be "mu na" birin fera.

Kurrant mu na;

Ye mu na;

Donse mu na;

Wali mu na;

Kobri mu na;

Seri mu na;

*Xarande mu na;
Kira mu na.*

My Guinean friends tell me that thanks to Kaleta Dam, they are getting more electricity than before. Thanks to the Ebola response, I believe that we will see major improvements in the quality of health care in Guinea in the near future. And having just been on the roads from Gaoul to Labe; Beyla to N'Zerekore, and Conakry to Coya and Dobreka, I have seen real progress in my time in Guinea.

My experience tells me that the trends for *kurrent*, *seri* and *kira* are generally positive.

This country is fortunate to have a talented economic team led by the Minister of Mines, the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank. However, the only way to get more *wali* and *kobri* to the people is to create economic conditions in which Guinean and foreign investors can operate free from corruption.

Whether we are talking about my friends the ladies who smoke fish in the Bolbinet or my friends in Rio Tinto, Guinea's best economic partners need the same thing ... the predictability of a functioning state that takes its share of what they produce ... nothing less, but also nothing more.

Despite this challenging list of *mu na's*, I believe Guinea has the resources to succeed.

It has a hardworking people whose labor is under-valued and under-appreciated.

It has a moral leadership in the mosques and churches and under the mango trees. It is a weak state sustained by a strong society.

It has an entrepreneurial culture that thrives abroad, even as it struggles at home.

It has loyal citizens who maintain contact with their communities and their country from Silver Spring, Dakar, Paris, Luanda, Guangzhou and everywhere else Guineans have gone in search of a better life.

It has a Guinean-American community that enriches both of our countries.

It has friends in the international community, including in the United States.

Thank you.

Ala xa LaGinee Baraka.